

The VALLEY of the GIANTS

By PETER B. KYNE

Author of "Cappy Ricks"

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"I CAN'T FIGHT ANY MORE."

Synopsis.—Pioneer in the California redwood region, John Cardigan, at forty-seven, is the leading citizen of Sequoia, owner of mills, ships, and many acres of timber, a widower after three years of married life, and father of two-day old Bryce Cardigan. At fourteen Bryce makes the acquaintance of Shirley Sumner, a visitor at Sequoia, and his junior by a few years. Together they visit the Valley of the Giants, sacred to John Cardigan and his son as the burial place of Bryce's mother, and part with mutual regret. While Bryce is at college John Cardigan meets with heavy business losses and for the first time views the future with uncertainty. After graduation from college, and a trip abroad, Bryce Cardigan comes home. On the train he is interested in an attractive girl.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

Bryce could see that she was the little daughter of some large rich man. The sparsity of jewelry and the rich simplicity of her attire proved that, and moreover she was accompanied by a French maid to whom she spoke in French in a manner which testified that before acquiring the French maid she had been in the custody of a French nurse. She possessed poise. For the rest, she had wonderful jet-black hair, violet eyes, and milk-white skin, a correct nose but a somewhat generous mouth. Bryce guessed she was twenty or twenty-one years old and that she had a temper susceptible of being aroused.

The fact that this remarkable young woman had also left the train at Red Bluff further interested him, for he knew Red Bluff and while giving credit to the many lovely damsels of that little ambitious city, Bryce had a suspicion that no former Red Bluff girl would dare to invade the old home town with a French maid. He noted, as further evidence of the correctness of his assumption, that the youthful baggage-smasher at the station failed to recognize her and was evidently dazzled when, followed by the maid, struggling with two suit-cases, she approached him and in pure though alien English inquired the location of the best hotel and the hour and point of departure of the automobile stage for San Hedrin. The youth had answered her first question and was about to answer the second when George Sea Otter, in all his barbaric splendor, came pussy-footing around the corner of the station in old man Cardigan's regal touring-car.

The Highest Living Authority, following the gaze of the baggage-smasher, turned and beheld George Sea Otter. Beyond a doubt he was of the West westward. She noted the rifle-stock projecting from the scabbard, and a vision of a stage hold-up flashed across her mind. Ah, yes, of course—the express messenger's weapon, no doubt! And further to clinch her instant assumption that here was the Sequoia motor-stage, there was the pennant adorning the wind-shield! Dismissing the baggage-smasher with a gracious smile, the Highest Living Authority approached George Sea Otter, noting, the while, further evidence that this car was a public conveyance, for the young man who had been her fellow-passenger was heading toward the automobile also. She heard him say:

"Hello, George, you radiant red rascal! I'm mighty glad to see you, boy. Shake!"

They shook, George Sea Otter's dark eyes and white teeth flashing pleasantly. Bryce tossed his bag into the tonneau; the half-breed opened the front door; and the young master had his foot on the running-board and was about to enter the car when a soft voice spoke at his elbow:

"Driver, this is the stage for Sequoia, is it not?"

George Sea Otter could scarcely credit his auditory nerves. "This car?" he demanded bluntly, "this—the Sequoia stage? Take a look, lady. This here's a Napier imported automobile. It's a private car and belongs to my boss here."

Bryce turned and lifted his hat.

"Quite naturally, you thought it was the Sequoia stage." He turned a smoldering glance upon George Sea Otter. "George," he declared ominously, but with a sly wink that drew the sting from his words, "if you're anxious to hold down your job, the next time a lady speaks to you and asks you a simple question, you answer yes or no and refrain from sarcastic remarks. Don't let your enthusiasm for this car run away with you." He faced the girl again. "Was it your intention to go to Sequoia on the next trip of the stage?"

She nodded.

"That means you will have to wait here three days until the stage returns from Sequoia," Bryce replied.

A shade of annoyance passed over the classic features of the Highest Living Authority. "Oh, dear," she complained, how fearfully awkward! Now I shall have to take the next train to San Francisco and book pas-

sage on the steamer to Sequoia—and Marcelle is such a poor sailor. Oh, dear!"

Bryce had an inspiration and hastened to reveal it.

"We are about to start for Sequoia now, although the lateness of our start will compel us to put up tonight at the rest-house on the south fork of Trinity river and continue the journey in the morning. However, this rest-house is eminently respectable and the food and accommodations are extraordinarily good for mountains; so, if an invitation to occupy the tonneau of my car will not be construed as an impertinence, coming as it does from a total stranger, you are at liberty to regard this car as to all intents and purposes the public conveyance which so scandalously declined to wait for you this morning."

She looked at him searchingly for a brief instant; then with a peculiarly winning smile and a graceful inclination of her head she thanked him and accepted his hospitality—thus:

"Why, certainly not! You are very kind, and I shall be eternally grateful."

"Thank you for that vote of confidence. It makes me feel that I have



"This is the Stage for Sequoia, is it Not?"

your permission to introduce myself. My name is Bryce Cardigan, and I live in Sequoia when I'm at home."

"Of Cardigan's redwoods?" she questioned. He nodded. "I've heard of you, I think," she continued. "I am Shirley Sumner."

"You do not live in Sequoia."

"No, but I'm going to hereafter. I was there about ten years ago."

He grinned and thrust out a great hand which she surveyed gravely for a minute before inserting hers in it. "I wonder," he said, "if it is to be my duty to give you a ride every time you come to Sequoia? The last time you were there you wheeled me into giving you a ride on my pony, an animal known as Midget. Do you, by any chance, recall that incident?"

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Why—why, you're the boy with the beautiful auburn hair," she declared. He lifted his hat and revealed his thick thatch in all its glory. "I'm not so sensitive about it now," he explained.

"When we first met, reference to my hair was apt to rile me." He shook his little hand with cordial good-nature. "George, suppose you pile Miss Sumner's hand-baggage in the tonneau and then pile in there yourself and keep Marcelle company. I'll drive; and you can sit up in front with me, Miss Sumner, snug behind the wind-shield where you'll not be blown about."

He went through his gears, and the car glided away on its journey. "By the way," he said suddenly as he turned west toward the distant blue mountains of Trinity county, "how did you happen to connect me with Cardigan's redwoods?"

"I've heard my uncle, Colonel Seth Pennington, speak of them."

"Colonel Seth Pennington means nothing in my young life. I never heard of him before; so I dare say he's a newcomer in our county. I've been away six years," he added in explanation.

"We're from Michigan. Uncle was formerly in the lumber business there, but he's logged out now."

"I see. So he came west, I suppose, and bought a lot of redwood lumber cheap from some old croaker who never could see any future to the redwood lumber industry. Personally, I don't think he could have made a better investment. I hope I shall have the pleasure of making his acquaintance when I deliver you to him. Perhaps you may be a neighbor of mine. Hope so."

At this juncture George Sea Otter, who had been an interested listener

to the conversation, essayed a grunt from the rear seat. Instantly, to Shirley Sumner's vast surprise, her host grunted also; whereupon George Sea Otter broke into a series of grunts and guttural exclamations which evidently appeared quite intelligible to her host, for he slowed down to five miles an hour and coked one ear to the rear; apparently he was profoundly interested in whatever information his henchman had to impart. When George Sea Otter finished his harangue, Bryce nodded and once more gave his attention to tossing the miles behind him.

"What language was that?" Shirley Sumner inquired, consumed with curiosity.

"Digger Indian," he replied. "George's mother was my nurse, and he and I grew up together. So I can't very well help speaking the language of the tribe."

They chattered volubly on many subjects for the first twenty miles; then the road narrowed and commenced to climb steadily, and thereafter Bryce gave all of his attention to the car, for a deviation of a foot from the wheel-rut on the outside of the road would have sent them hurtling over the grade into the deep-timbered canyons below. By reason of the fact that Bryce's gaze never wavered from the road immediately in front of the car, she had a chance to appraise him critically while pretending to look past him to the tumbled, snow-covered ranges to their right.

She saw a big, supple, powerful man of twenty-five or six, with the bearing and general demeanor of one many years his elder. His nose was high, of medium thickness and just a trifle long—the nose of a thinker. His ears were large, with full lobes—the ears of a generous man. The mouth, full-lipped but firm, the heavy jaw and square chin, the great hands (most amazingly free from freckles) denoted the man who would not avoid a fight worth while.

Upon their arrival at the rest-house, Bryce during dinner was very attentive and mildly amusing, although Shirley's keen wits assured her that this was merely a clever pose and sustained with difficulty. She was confirmed in this assumption when, after dinner, she complained of being weary and bade him good-night. She had scarcely left him when he called:

"George!"

The half-breed slid out of the darkness and sat down beside him. A moment later, through the open window of her room just above the porch where Bryce and George Sea Otter sat, Shirley heard the former say:

"George, when did you first notice that my father's sight was beginning to fail?"

"About two years ago, Bryce. He began to walk with his hands held out in front of him, and sometimes he lifted his feet too high."

"Can he see at all now, George?"

"Oh, yes, a little bit—enough to make his way to the office and back."

"Poor old governor! George, until you told me this afternoon, I hadn't heard a word about it. If I had, I never would have taken that two-year jaunt around the world. And you say this man Colonel Pennington and my father have been having trouble."

"Yes—Here George Sea Otter gracefully unburdened himself of a



"Dad! He Called."

fervent curse directed at Shirley's avuncular relative; whereupon that young lady promptly left the window and heard no more.

They were on the road again by eight o'clock next morning, and just as Cardigan's mill was blowing the six o'clock whistle, Bryce stopped the car at the head of the street leading down to the water-front. "I'll let you

drive now, George," he informed the silent Sea Otter. He turned to Shirley Sumner. "I'm going to leave you now," he said. "Thank you for riding over from Red Bluff with me. My father never leaves the office until the whistle blows, and so I'm going to hurry down to that little building you see at the end of the street and surprise him."

He stepped out on the running-board, stood there a moment, and extended his hand. Shirley had commenced a due and formal expression of her gratitude for having been delivered safely in Sequoia, when George Sea Otter spoke:

"Here comes John Cardigan," he said.

"Drive Miss Sumner around to Colonel Pennington's house," Bryce ordered, and even while he held Shirley's hand, he turned to catch the first glimpse of his father. Shirley followed his glance and saw a tall, powerfully built old man coming down the street with his hands thrust a little in front of him, as if for protection from some invisible assailant.

"Oh, my poor old father!" she heard Bryce Cardigan murmur. "My dear old pal! And I've let him grope in the dark for two years!"

He released her hand and leaped from the car. "Dad!" he called. "It is I—Bryce. I've come home to you at last."

The slightly bent figure of John Cardigan straightened with a jerk; he held out his arms, trembling with eagerness, and as the car continued on to the Pennington house Shirley looked back and saw Bryce folded in his father's embrace. She did not, however, hear the heart-cry which the beated old man welcomed his boy.

"Sonny, sonny—oh, I'm so glad you're back. I've missed you, Bryce, I'm whipped—I've lost your heritage. Oh, son! I'm old—I can't fight any more. I'm blind—I can't see my enemies. I've lost your redwood trees—even your mother's Valley of the Giants."

And he commenced to weep for the third time in fifty years. And when the aged and helpless weep, nothing is more terrible. Bryce Cardigan said no word, but held his father close to his great heart and laid his cheek gently against the old man's tenderly as a woman's might. And presently, from that silent communion of spirit, each drew strength and comfort. As the shadows fell in John Cardigan's town, they went home to the house on the hill.

Shirley Sumner's eyes were moist when George Sea Otter, in obedience to the instructions of his youthful master, set her, the French maid, and their hand-baggage down on the sidewalk in front of Colonel Seth Pennington's house. The half-breed hesitated a moment, undecided whether he would carry the hand-baggage up to the door or leave that task for a Pennington retainer; then he noted the tearstains on the cheeks of his fair passenger. Instantly he took up the hand-baggage, kicked open the iron gate, and preceded Shirley up the cement walk to the door.

"Just wait a moment, if you please, George," Shirley said as he set the baggage down and started back for the car. He turned and beheld her extracting a five-dollar bill from her purse. "For you, George," she continued. "Thank you so much."

In all his life George Sea Otter had never had such an experience—he, happily, having been raised in a country where, with the exception of waiters, only a pronounced vagrant expects or accepts a gratuity from a woman. He took the bill and fingered it curiously; then his white blood asserted itself and he handed the bill back to Shirley.

"Thank you," he said respectfully.

"If you were a man—all right. But from a lady—no. I am like my boss. I work for you for nothing!"

Shirley did not understand his refusal, but her instinctive tact warned her not to insist. She returned the bill to her purse, thanked him again, and turned quickly to hide the slight flush of annoyance. George Sea Otter noted it.

"Lady," he said with great dignity, "at first I did not want to carry your baggage. I did not want to walk on this land." And with a sweeping gesture he indicated the Pennington grounds. "Then you cry a little because my boss is feeling bad about his old man. So I like you better. The old man—well, he has been like father to me and my mother—and we are Indians. My brothers, too—they work for him. So if you like my boss and his old man, George Sea Otter would go to hell for you pretty damn' quick. You bet your life!"

"You're a very good boy, George," she replied, with difficulty repressing a smile at his blunt but earnest avowal. "I am glad the Cardigans have such an honest, loyal servant."

George Sea Otter's dark face lighted with a quick smile. "Now you pay me," he replied and returned to the car.

The door opened, and a Swedish maid stood in the entrance regarding her stolidly. "I'm Miss Sumner," Shirley told her. "This is my maid Marcelle. Help her in with the hand-baggage." She stepped into the hall and called: "Ooh-hoo! Nunky-dunk!"

"Ship ahoy!" An answering call came to her from the dining room, across the entrance-hall and an instant later Colonel Seth Pennington stood in the doorway. "Bless my whiskers! Is that you, my dear?" he cried, and advanced to greet her. "Why, how did you get here, Shirley? I thought you'd missed 'the stage.'"

She presented her cheek for his kiss. "So I did, Uncle, but a nice red-haired young man named Bryce Cardigan found me in distress at Red Bluff picked me up in his car, and brought me here." She sniffed adorably. "I'm so hungry," she declared, "and here I am, just in time for dinner. Is my name in the pot?"

"It isn't, Shirley, but it soon will be. How perfectly bully to have you with me again, my dear! And what a charming young lady you've grown to be since I saw you last! You're—why, you've been crying! By Jove, I had no idea you'd be so glad to see me again."

She could not forego a sly little smile at his egotism. "You're looking perfectly splendid Uncle Seth," she parried.

"And I'm feeling perfectly splendid. By the way, who did you say picked you up in his car?"

"Bryce Cardigan. Do you know him?"

"No, we haven't met. Son of old John Cardigan, I dare say. I've heard of him. He's been away from Sequoia



"Why, How Did You Get Here, Shirley?"

for quite a while, I believe. About time he came home to take care of that stiff-necked old father of his." He stepped to the bell and pressed it, and the butler answered. "Set a place at dinner for Miss Shirley, James," he ordered. "Thelma will show you your rooms, Shirley. I was just about to sit down to dinner. I'll wait for you."

While Shirley was in the dining room Colonel Pennington's features wore an expression almost pontifical, but when she had gone, the atmosphere of paternalism and affection which he radiated faded instantly. The Colonel's face was in repose now—cold, calculating, vaguely repellent. He scowled slightly.

"Now, isn't that the devil's luck?" he soliloquized. "Young Cardigan is probably the only man in Sequoia—dashed awkward if they should become interested in each other—at this time. They say he's good-looking; certainly he is educated and has acquired some worldly polish—just the kind of young fellow Shirley will find interesting and welcome company in a town like this. Many things can happen in a year—and it will be a year before I can smash the Cardigans. Damn it!"

CHAPTER V.

Along the well-remembered streets of Sequoia Bryce Cardigan and his father walked arm in arm, their progress continuously interrupted by well-meaning but impulsive Sequoians who insisted upon halting the pair to shake hands with Bryce and bid him welcome home. In the presence of those third parties the old man quickly conquered the agitation he had felt at this long-deferred meeting with his son, and when presently they left the business section of the town and turned into a less-frequented street, his emotion assumed the character of a quiet joy, evidenced in a more erect bearing and a firmer tread, as if he strove, despite his seventy-six years, not to appear incongruous as he walked beside his splendid son.

I wish I could see you more clearly," he said presently. His voice as well as his words expressed profound regret, but there was no hint of despair or heart-break now.

Bryce, who up to this moment had refrained from discussing his father's misfortunes, drew the old man a little closer to his side.

"What's wrong with your eyes, pal?" he queried. He did not often address his parent, after the fashion of most sons, as "Father," "Dad," or "Pop." They were closer to each other than that, and a rare sense of perfect comradeship found expression, on Bryce's part, in such salutations as "pal," "partner" and, infrequently, "old sport."

"Cataracts, son," his father answered. "Merely the penalty of old age."

"But can't something be done about it?" demanded Bryce. "Can't they be cured somehow or other?"

"Oh, Bryce, the man hasn't a soul."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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